

L O U N G E R.

[N^o LXXI.]

Saturday, June 10. 1786.

Querite nunc habeat quam nostra superbia causam.

OVID.

THERE is no complaint more common than that which is made against the pride of wealth. The claim of superiority which rests upon a circumstance so adventitious as that of suddenly-acquired riches, is universally decried as the insolent pretension of mean and illiberal minds, and is resisted with a greater degree of scorn and indignation, than, perhaps, any other encroachment of vanity or self-importance.

Yet one might observe in those who are loudest in the censure of this weakness, a certain shame of being poor, which in a great measure justifies the pride of being rich. One may trace this in their affectation of indifference to all those pleasures and conveniences which riches procure, and in the eulogium they often make, in despite of their own real feelings, of the opposite circumstances. When they are at pains to declare how much better the plain dish and home-brewed liquor suits their taste than the high-seasoned ragout and the high-priced wine, what is it but disguising their inability to procure the luxury under the pretence of their preferring its opposite. Poverty, in this case, flies from her own honourable tattered colours, to join the fresh and flaunting standard of Wealth; she allows the power of those very external circumstances by which Wealth lays claim to a superiority. The dignity of her station should be supported on other grounds: the little value of those external circumstances in which Wealth has the advantage, when compared with the virtues and qualities which money cannot buy, when set in competition with that native purity and elevation of mind, which in the acquisition of wealth we frequently forfeit, and in its possession we frequently destroy.

Both in those who possess riches and in those who want them, false pretension often defeats itself. It would often be for the honour of Wealth if he could lay down his insolence, and for the happiness of Poverty if she could smooth her scorn. True benevolence and delicacy would teach both their proper duties, and preserve those cordial charities of life, which, in different stations and in different circumstances, promote alike the comfort of individuals and the general advantage of society.

But it is only over minds of a higher order that external circumstances do not possess a power to push them from that equilibrium in which virtue and happiness reside. Ordinary men will equally feel the inflation of prosperity, and the harshness of a less favourable situation; will in the one case incur the contempt and derision of the world, and in the other experience the grating of a ruffled spirit. Moderation and wisdom would teach the one to procure respect, and the other to attain good-humour.

I remember some years ago,—it was during the last war, and it is of no importance that I have forgot the exact date,—being invited to dine at the house of Mr *Draper*, one of the most considerable merchants in this country. Mr Draper twenty years ago was not worth a shilling; but by a course of industry, and great intelligence in his profession, he is reported since that time to have realised a very great fortune.

The principal part of our company, I found, upon entering the house, consisted of Sir *William Roberts*, his Lady, and children. Sir William is a country gentleman, the representative of a very old and respectable family, whose ancestors were once in possession of a great estate; but partly from a want of œconomy in some of its proprietors, and partly from other changes in manners, and the mode of living, it is now dwindled down to an inconsiderable amount. Sir William, however, still feels strongly the pride of ancient family, and is apt to be hurt by the rise of those *new* men who are but of yesterday, and yet overtop him in wealth.

When I entered the drawing-room the company were pretty generally assembled. Sir William's manner attracted my notice, and I found in it the most finished complaisance and attention. There was a degree of politeness which carried in its appearance the utmost respect and condescension to Mr Draper and his family; at the same time there was a formal distance, which was calculated to prevent them from using any familiarity with him, and, instead of shewing that Sir William really felt high reverence for the company, contained evident marks of his considering himself as much above them. We stoop as well as rise with difficulty; 'tis on even ground that we carry ourselves easily.

Draper's manner was very different. Without being in the least moved by Sir William's formal obeisance, he went on in his usual way, giving a display of the richness of his house and furniture. I had not been long in the company when he took occasion to observe, that he never knew the times so bad as now, and never was money scarcer. This very morning, continued he, I was applied to for payment of a bond of L. 10,000, against next Whitsun-term;

term ; but instead of waiting for the term, I gave orders that the money should be paid *immediately*. Sir William looked, and said nothing.

At this time there came into the room a son of Mr Draper's, a boy about 10 years of age. The boy was at the public school of the city; and that very day, agreeably to a pretty general custom, the scholars had been making a present or offering in money to their masters. It is the practice, in such cases, for children of rich parents to vie with one another who shall give the greatest present; and the vanity of the parents is generally as much interested on the occasion as that of the sons. " Papa," says young Draper, " I was King at school to-day, having given the highest offering." Sir William said nothing; but his son, a lively little fellow, about the same age, and in the same class with Mr Draper's son, sprung forward, and gave him a blow in the face, which set him a-crying. This incident produced some confusion, but the company was at length composed.

Dinner was now served up. It consisted of two magnificent courses and a desert; and Mr Draper frequently observed, that part of the dishes came from his little farm in the West Indies. Sir William eat but of one dish, observing, that he always found his health and his appetite best when he dined plainly.

After dinner, a great variety of wines were set upon the table. Sir William, instead of drinking the high-priced French and German wines, tasted nothing but a little Port and water; repeating his former observation, that as he eat, so he regulated his drinking, for his stomach's sake.

In a little time one of the servants brought in Mr Draper's letters. Mr Draper looked them over, and then began to talk of politics. He said, he had got a variety of important intelligence in the dispatches he had received, and talked with the confidence of a rich man, whose credit in point of information was as unimpeachable as in point of wealth. He mentioned, in particular, information which that day's post had brought him, of the destination of a certain secret expedition then going on, and that he knew well the troops were about that time making good their landing at the appointed place. Sir William had, just the day before, received a letter from a cousin of his, the second in command on that expedition, telling him that the troops were not yet failed, and that their object was still unknown. Sir William said nothing of this, but allowed Mr Draper to plume himself on his superior information; only I, who knew the circumstance, observed a smile on the Baronet's face, of which I could translate all the conscious superiority.

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My attention was now turned to the younger members of the two families. I observed Mr Draper's eldest son, a good-looking lad of four and twenty, paying very particular attention to the eldest Miss Roberts, next whom he happened to be seated. This attention was not unobserved by the parents. Mr Draper, with all his attachment to wealth, was not without the ambition of connecting his children with ancient blood, and an alliance with the family of the Robertses, who had long been at the head of the county, and had frequently represented it in parliament, would not have been disagreeable to him. As the Drapers had hitherto triumphed in their wealth, so now the Robertses began to triumph in their ancestry. Mr Draper observed that his was as yet but a young family, and said something of the high respect he had for the family of Sir William Roberts; how happy it made him that his present company had eat a bit of mutton with him, and what satisfaction it would give him to cultivate a closer friendship and connection with them. He therefore proposed that the company should drink a bumper to their better acquaintance; and insisted that Sir William should give up his Port and water, and drink the bumper in Burgundy.—Upon this Miss Roberts drew off her chair as far as she could from young Mr Draper: Lady Roberts bridled up—Mrs Draper bridled up in return—Sir William drank off the bumper of Burgundy.

To break through the awkward silence which this had occasioned, I suggested that one of the young ladies should give us a song; which proposal was acquiesced in. Miss Draper sung an Italian air, which she had learned of a celebrated Master. Her father took occasion to tell the price of his lessons. "It is now your turn," said he to Miss Roberts. "She never sings," said her father, somewhat sternly. His daughter blushed, and was silent. Soon after the ladies withdrew. The remainder of the afternoon was spent in Sir William's drinking his Port and water, and in Mr Draper and the greatest part of his company getting flustered in Burgundy and Claret. When at last, upon a message from Lady Roberts, Sir William joined her and his children in the lobby, and went off in the family-coach drawn by four horses, which had been employed in that service for fifteen years, and were driven by postilions with rich but old-fashioned liveries.

EDINBURGH:

Published by WILLIAM CREECH; by whom Communications
from Correspondents are received.

Next Saturday will be published N^o LXXII.